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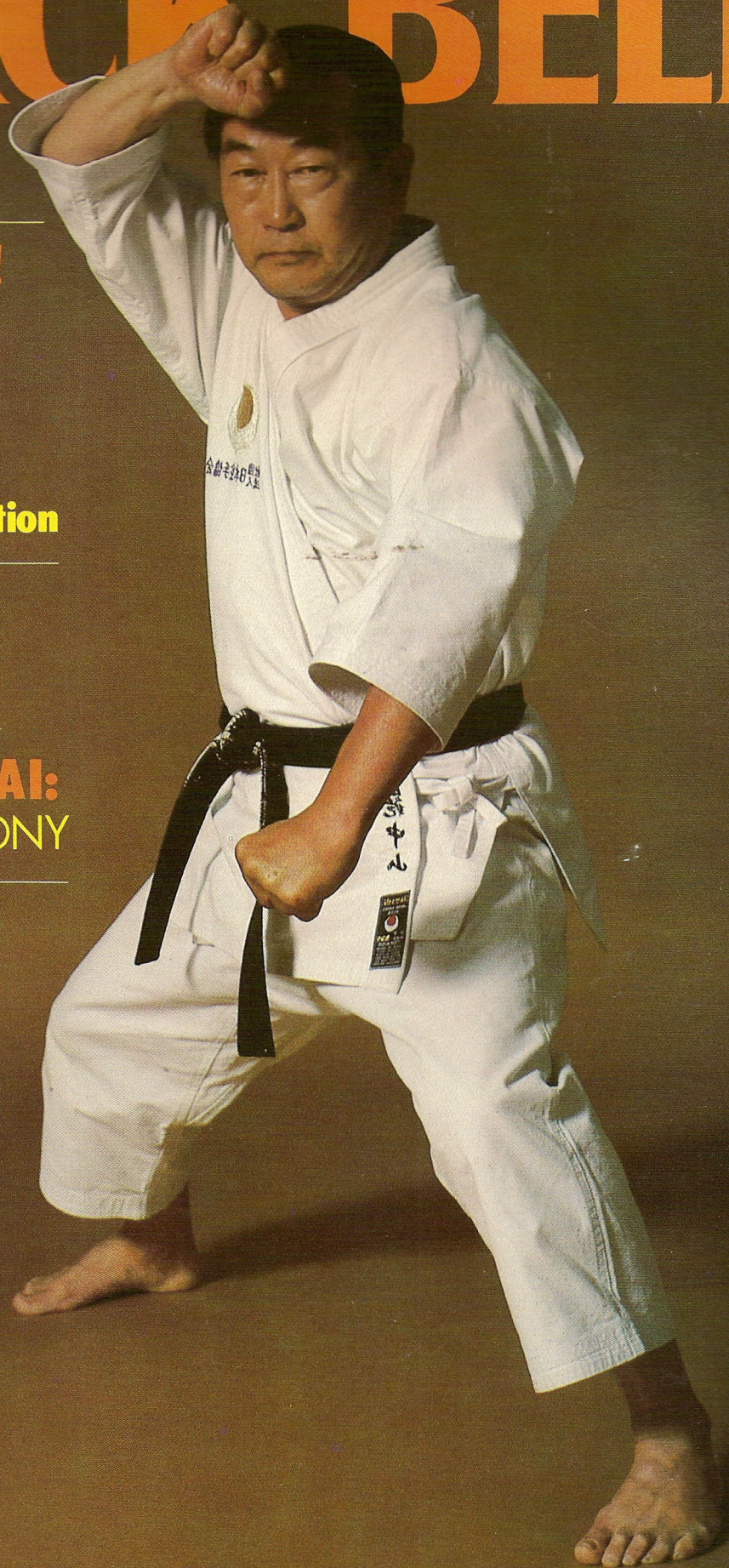


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SELF-DEFENSE:

**DEALING
WITH
MULTIPLE
ATTACKERS**



It's Saturday night and you're walking home alone. Suddenly, out of the darkness, you're confronted by two thugs. You try to talk your way out of the situation, but a physical confrontation appears inevitable.

Now's the time to apply all your martial arts training to a real-life situation. However, you've got two attackers, not one. What do you do? What factors should you consider? What strategies can you follow?

Most martial arts training is limited to the dojo, where situations are one-on-one; you have one attacker whom you are familiar with. Usually the attack is known—either a simulated street attack or a specific strike or kick.

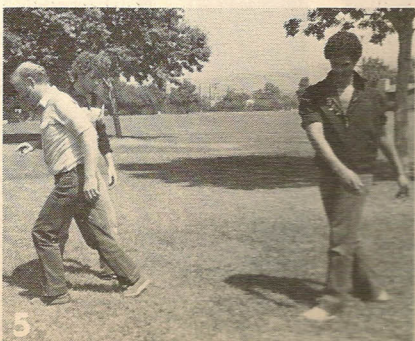
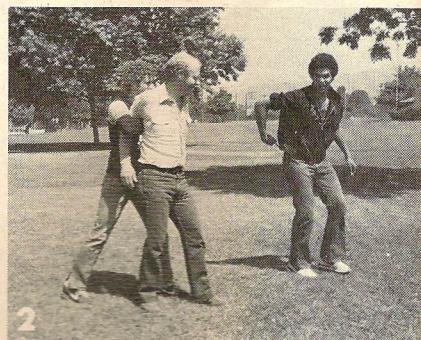
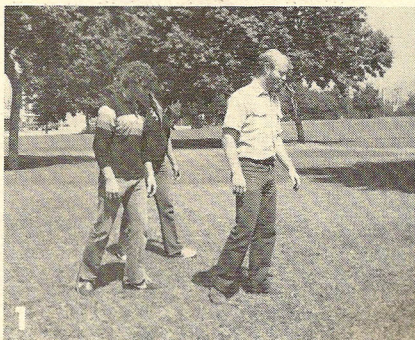
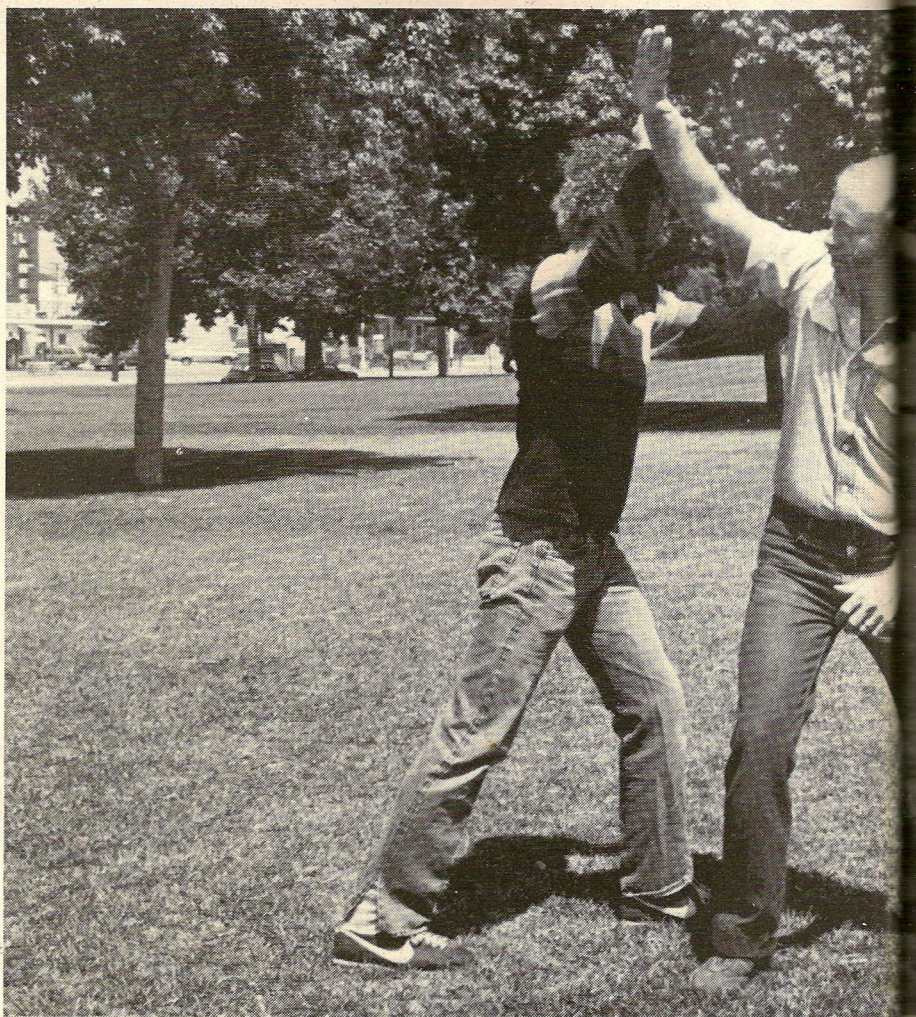
Dealing with a single attacker is an excellent way to learn techniques and perfect them. Working freestyle with one attacker is an excellent way to develop speed, coordination, and techniques specifically suited to your abilities. One attacker allows you to deliver quick reactions and make simple decisions.

Two or more attackers are a whole different show. Many dojos don't deal with multiple attackers at all because of the complexities involved. It is not as simple and neat as working with a single assailant. Techniques that work well in a single-attacker situation may be suicidal with two or more attackers. Split-second decisions must be made that cannot be anticipated and your instructor cannot forewarn you about. Unless carefully supervised, multiple-attacker situations can result in confusion, frustration, and serious injuries.

However, *not* dealing with the issue as a part of the advanced student's training doesn't solve any problems either. Sweeping the matter under the rug by saying, "It's like dealing with two single attackers," oversimplifies the problem. Confronting the problem at least recognizes it and provides you with the opportunity of developing skills in that area. It at

by George Kirby

DEALING WITH MULTIPLE ATTACKERS: SOME STRATEGIES



At right, a situation no one would want to face. The author, walking through a park, is suddenly grabbed from behind while another assailant confronts him with a knife (1-3). The knife-wielding opponent is most dangerous, so Kirby attempts to disarm him (4) with a kick, initiating a spinning move against the second attacker (5). This move is the most critical, for he must successfully escape the grab in order (6&7) to use one attacker as a shield against the other.

MULTIPLE ATTACKERS: KJIS FOR SURVIVAL

least gives you some experience, even though it is in the controlled environment of your dojo.

Making the Best of a Bad Situation

A multiple-attacker confrontation is a bad street situation. It places a severe strain on strategy and skills. It requires flexibility in thinking. It also requires a much greater awareness of your immediate environment. It's never a simple matter, in other words. However, there are ways to make the best out of a bad situation.

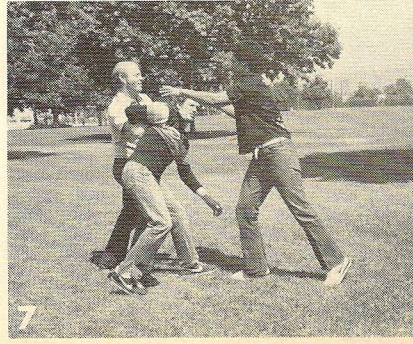
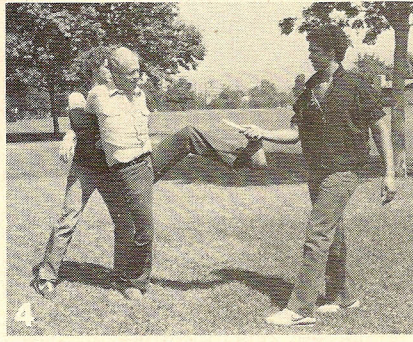
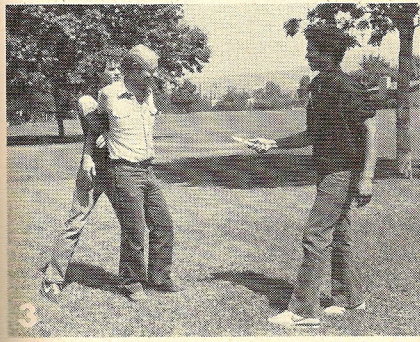
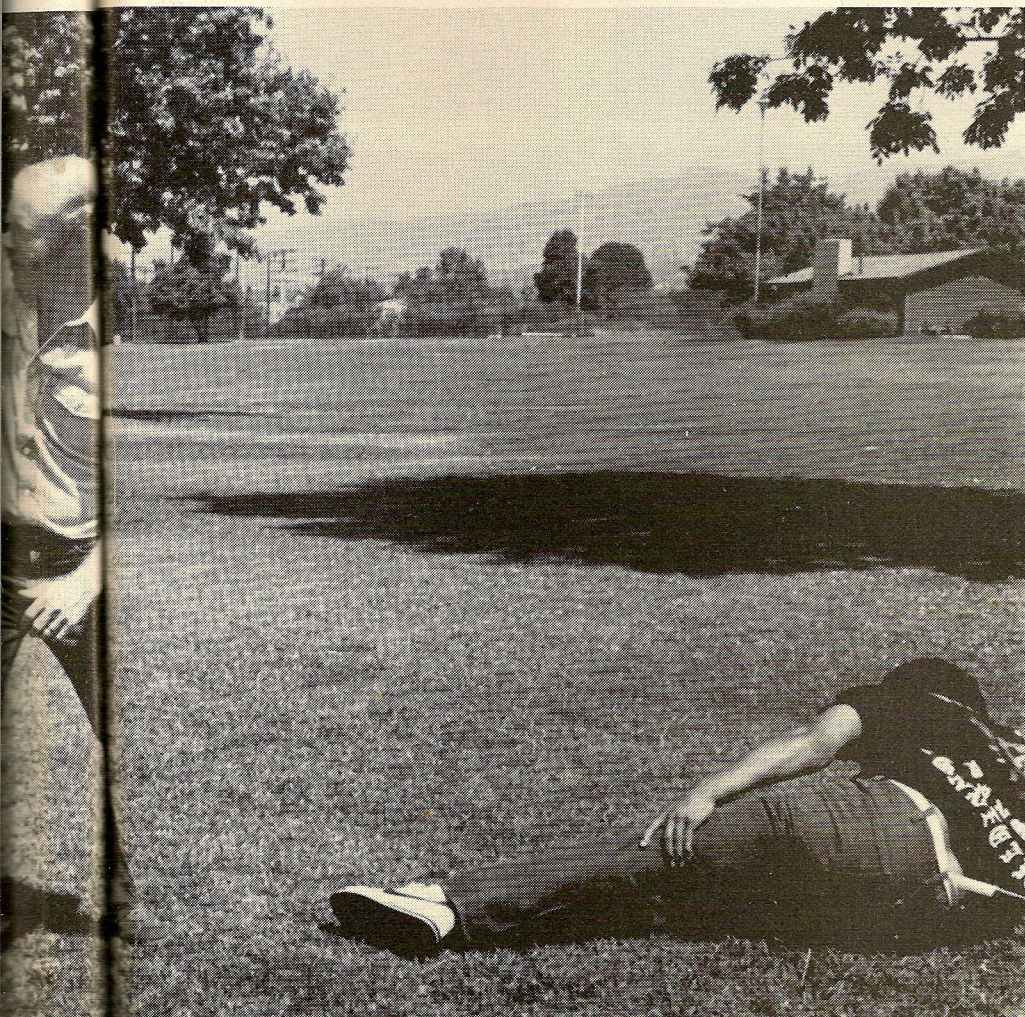
There are four areas that should be considered. Three can be considered external factors (coming from outside of your body), and one an internal factor (coming from within your body). While this article cannot cover every aspect of multiple attackers, the four general areas it will consider are: (1) your environment or surroundings; (2) the concept of the circle; (3) the attackers, (these three are external factors); and (4) some basic strategies.

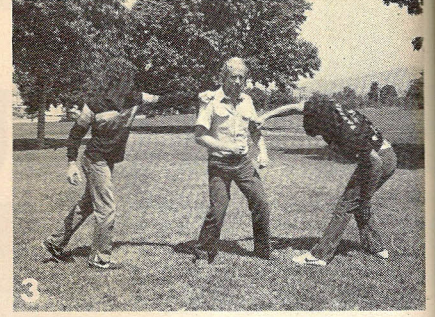
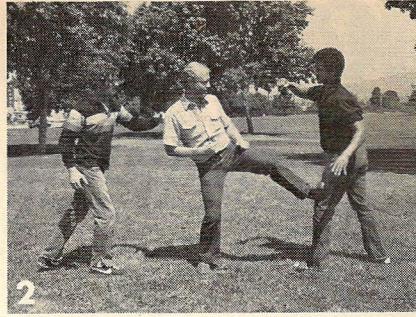
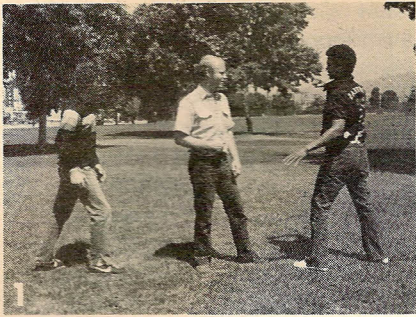
Two of the external factors can be considered together, environment and the concept of the circle or wheel, as they're closely related. Your environment is everything around you in your immediate vicinity. The concept of the circle or wheel is usually referred to in most soft martial arts as the theory behind the continuous motion of the attacker and the utilization of his own ki to bring him down. This is an oversimplification of the circle theory, but is satisfactory for a brief explanation. (See BLACK BELT, December 1981, for more.)

In dealing with multiple attackers, the concept of the circle has a somewhat different meaning. Consider yourself the center of a circle (or hub of a wheel) and think of your attackers as the rim.

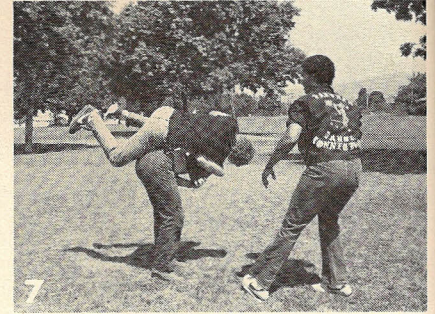
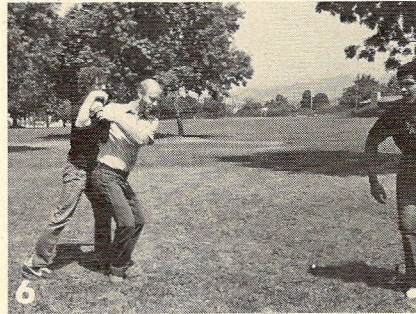
If you think in these terms you can establish what can be called a *danger zone*. The danger zone, simply put, is that area in which an attacker can inflict injury on you. The danger zone generally starts about 18 inches from you and extends to a distance of about four feet—an area from which hits and kicks can effectively make contact with you. Closer than 18 inches, you will probably be faced with holds. They usually don't require as fast a response time—unless the second opponent is also attacking or the assailant holding you has a weapon.

Within the danger zone, your chief asset is your vision. You will rely on direct and peripheral vision





Now both attackers are within the defender's danger zone (1). He attempts to disable one opponent quickly enough to ward off the other (2). Then he turns (3), using peripheral vision to keep track of the first attacker (4&5). The second attacker can then be thrown directly at the first, who is resuming his aggression (6-8); and the defender backs away (9) in a safe direction.



as a warning of the attack. You will also have a blind zone. Your direct vision will give you a clear, sharp view of about 90 degrees (one-fourth of a circle). Peripheral vision will extend your sight to 180 degrees (one-half circle) and sometimes beyond that, depending on available light, movement, and your eye sensitivity.

Your peripheral vision will usually warn you of an attack and is extremely important with multiple attackers, when a wide range of vision is essential. By scanning, you can also increase your area of direct vision. Effective use of your peripheral vision will also reduce your blind zone. (The blind zone, by the way, is the area behind you that you can't see.) If you can't see an attack coming at you, you can't effectively defend against it. Protect and move your blind zone constantly so as to have a greater view of the rim.

Sound is another factor to be considered in the environment of your circle. Sound can be an asset or liability. It can be an asset if it provides you with a clue as to where the attack is coming from. But it can also be used by one attacker to distract you from

the other(s). Your ability to scan is your best tool in differentiating between clues and distraction.

The last factor to be considered in the environment of the circle is physical objects. What kind of surface are you on? Are you near or against a wall? Is there a curb, telephone pole, fire hydrant, or other obstacle in the circle or immediate vicinity? Any object in your circle can be used by you—or against you. It all depends on what you know.

A wall, for example, can be an asset or liability. It can protect your blind area, but it can also prevent you from escaping or using some of your techniques. If you know how to use a wall as an object within your circle, it is an asset. If you don't, it can be your worst enemy, as it has cut your circle in half, put up a physical barrier that can be used against you, and severely limited your movement.

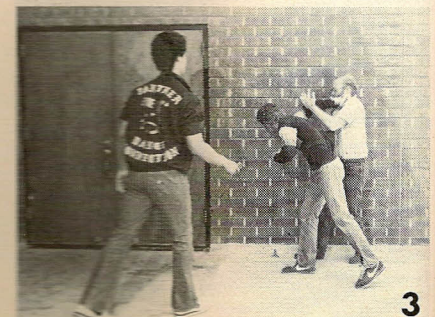
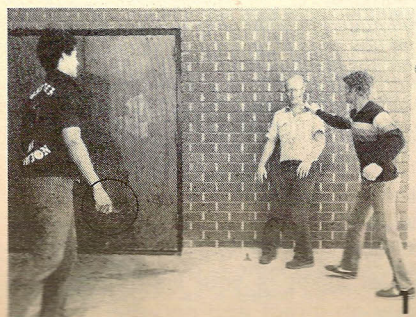
The third external element that should be considered is the attackers. How many are there? How big are they? Do they have weapons? Where are they located on the rim? What is their injury potential and what is yours? These questions should be

considered in deciding what course of action you will take. All of these items are of equal importance.

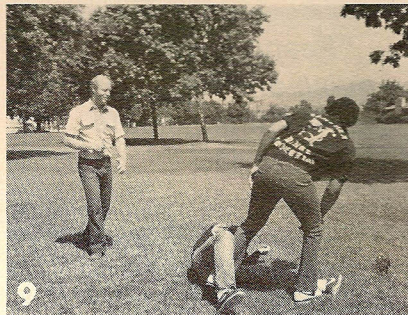
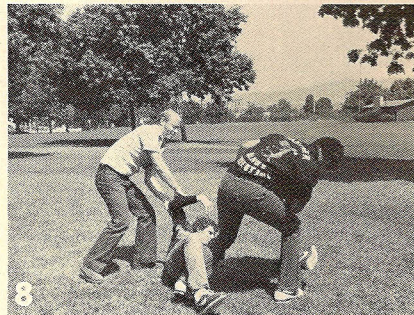
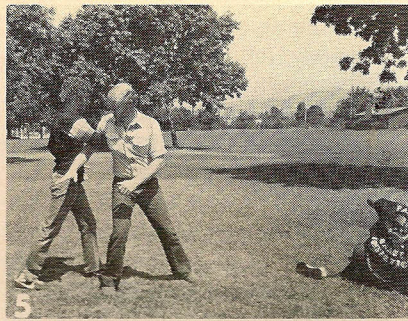
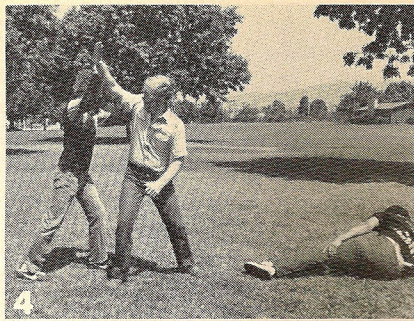
The number of attackers will have a direct effect on your survivability. Dealing with two attackers is relatively simple when compared to three attackers. Each additional attacker beyond two has a greater negative effect on your ability to survive.

How big are your attackers? Obviously their size and stature will have an effect on what you do. You may be lucky and have the opportunity of choosing which attacker to deal with first. If one of the attackers has a weapon, he poses a substantially greater threat.

The location of the attackers on the rim also determines what you can do. If they're both in front of you it's obviously better than having one in



Here the defender is trapped (1) and one attacker is armed with a piece of broken glass. The defender can use the wall in his favor, however, smashing one attacker head first into it (2-4), then using that attacker as a shield (5&6). The first attacker is always maneuvered into the path of the second.



front and one behind you. You must also consider if one attacker is closer to you than the other. The other factors mentioned, when combined with this, would also determine whether the closer attacker poses a greater threat than one further away.

Lastly, putting all of this together, you must consider two main things about your attackers: which one poses the greatest threat to you overall, and which one can you defeat with the greatest ease (a relative term).

Strategies

"Good grief!" you're probably saying at this point. "How do I think of all these things and defend myself at the same time?" It seems like an impossible situation.

It's not as bad as it sounds. Sometimes you may have several seconds (which is a lot of time) to size up a situation. Most of the external factors can be evaluated and decided upon in one or two seconds. Sometimes there appears to be no time at all and you have to make what seem to be instantaneous decisions. But even this is possible if your mind is trained at what to look for.

There are a few basic rules you can follow that will not only simplify things, but will also improve your chances of coming out on top against two or more attackers.

1. *Don't use any techniques that will put you on the ground.* If you do anything that puts you on the ground, you're really reducing your chances. If you're knocked to the ground, that's another story. You may have to defend yourself from there. (Do you know any ground defenses?) Don't use pins or ground submissions. They're effective with one attacker, but you're putting yourself in a bad position if the other attacker is still standing.

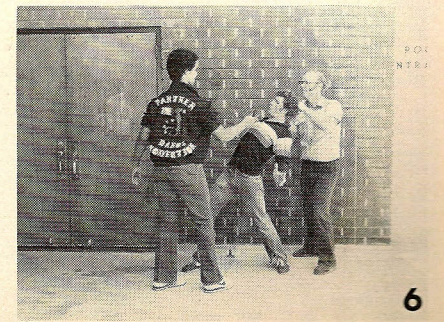
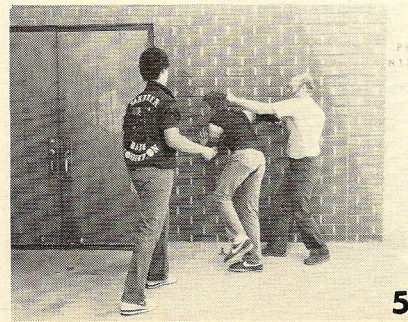
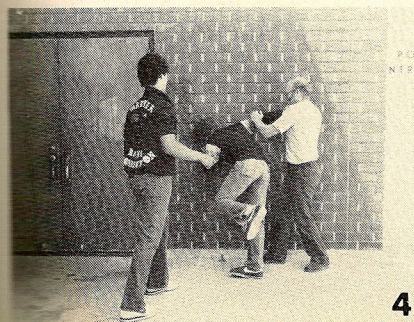
2. *Use one attacker against the other whenever possible.* Examples of this might be throwing one attacker into another, maneuvering them so they're in each other's way, or putting one attacker into a standing-submission or come-along hold so that he can be used as a shield against the other attacker(s). Throwing one attacker into another has the obvious advantage of "killing two birds with one stone"—creating confusion and fear among

the attackers, in addition to any physical damage done.

Using one attacker as a shield also has physical and psychological benefits. If one attacker can be used as a shield, the others will have to get through him to get to you. Second, if the shield is being held with a *proper* hold you can create a lot of pain and injure him quite easily. (A proper hold is one in which the attacker's resistance or the final execution of the hold can result in a fracture and/or joint dislocation.) Both techniques can be used to prevent further assault upon you. If the other assailants see that their cohort is going to be the target of their attacks, or that you're in a position to inflict serious injury (as evidenced by the shield's cries of pain), they may recognize that you have control of the situation and retreat. If this occurs, continue to use the shield until you can safely remove yourself from the conflict.

3. *Injure your first attacker as severely as possible.* This is an extension of the second strategy, but its intent is serious bodily injury. The first attacker you deal with, according to this strategy, should not be able to get up or continue as an attacker, verbally or physically. The sole purpose of this strategy is to create enough pain in one attacker so that the others will be too scared to continue the assault. Your intent here is to create fear. This must be quick and devastating. It must make the other attackers think twice. It must create doubt in their minds about their chances of winning—and about the possibility of being similarly injured.

While this strategy is an extension of 2, it also reflects a basic difference in strategic choices. With 2, you are attempting to get out of the situation by using the least force necessary. With 3, it has become necessary to inflict serious injury to get your point across. Both strategies are directed toward accomplishing the same thing: getting out of the confrontation, but only having to deal directly



with one attacker. Strategy 2 can quickly become 3 if the need arises. Your training and situation will determine which route you take.

4. *Be aware of and use the danger-zone concept.* Try to keep at least four feet between you and your attackers if possible. If closer contact is inevitable, you must be ready and able to use whatever techniques possible to bring your opponents down. This includes hits and kicks (to keep attackers further away or bring them down), as well as the use of nerves, pressure points, come-along skills, or throws, if your training is oriented toward close-in situations. Don't put yourself in a position where you can be hit, kicked, or grabbed if you can avoid it.

In using the danger-zone concept, you should have as large a repertoire of techniques as possible. Each martial art has limitations in the area of the circle. You should be aware of the limitations of your particular art and compensate for them. Generally speaking, the hits and kicks of most styles of karate are ineffective when the opponent is closer than 18 inches. Many aikido techniques are unusable if the opponent is too far away. Judo

throws are usually effective only if solid body contact can be made. These generalizations are useful to illustrate the necessity of a wide repertoire, not one strictly limited to one art.

5. *Use eye contact and body language effectively.* The effective use of eye contact goes hand-in-hand with the danger-zone concept. With one attacker, you may be able to stare him

“Response must be quick and devastating; it should create doubt in the attackers’ minds . . .”

down, causing him to back out of the situation. Appearing calm is also necessary. This approach may also work in a multiple-attacker situation if the physical attack hasn't commenced yet, or if one attacker is down and the others are pausing for a moment. It is probably far more effective to maintain general eye contact with whoever seems to be the leader, while using your scanning ability to enhance your peripheral vision. Be

careful though. A lot of eye movement and moving around quickly may be perceived (somewhat correctly) as fear. This may enhance your attackers' feelings of confidence.

6. *Be flexible!* This is the most important rule to follow. There are exceptions to all of the rules mentioned. Don't assume these strategies are rigid and absolute. They're not! They're simply good guidelines to improve your chances of survival.

Putting Strategies to Use

These strategies can be used to help you establish better control of a multiple-attacker situation. For example, if you have one attacker in front of you and one behind, remember the concept of the wheel. Step to one side or the other, thus moving the hub. Your attackers are still on the rim but you'll have a better view of them. If attack is imminent and you feel that you can get control of one attacker, do it and use him as a shield. If one attacker is holding you from behind and the person in front of you hasn't done anything yet, use strategy 2 or 3 (shield or severe injury) to take care of the person holding you. If the forward attacker is hitting you or has a weapon, you may have to ward him off with kicks, quickly deal with the rear attacker, and then continue with the forward foe. Be flexible in your thinking.

Conclusions

Dealing with multiple attackers is never a good situation. It demands all of your skills, knowledge, training, and a great deal of flexibility. If you can adapt the basic strategies presented in this article to your particular martial art, then your chances of success on the street can be improved.

You must be realistic. The more attackers you face at one time, the less your chances are of winning. What you see in “socky-chop” movies may look good, but life doesn't work that way—neither does the street. As in any street situation, whether it be against one or more attackers, *you must establish control* of the situation. With one attacker, you may not have to inflict any actual physical injury. Chances are, the fight will be much more serious if you are attacked by more than one. If you must injure an assailant, make sure it looks and sounds bad enough to cause the other attacker(s) to think twice.

Keep control of yourself and control the situation. This is the primary

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rule in any situation in which you hope to succeed, whether in your daily life or in a street confrontation. If you have control, or even limited control, of the situation, you have better control of the outcome. If you lose control of yourself, it's guaranteed that you'll lose control of the outcome.

Success on the street is determined by good training in the dojo. Work with multiple attackers in a variety of situations. If your dojo has a VCR set-up, use it. It's the best tool for viewing what happened, what worked, and what didn't. Rely on your instructor for pointers on how to survive multiple attackers. He may spot things you don't, both good and bad. Be aware, however, that some multiple-attacker defenses cannot be fully executed at normal speed in the dojo (such as throwing one attacker into another or into a wall). Great care and self-control must be demonstrated out of respect to your partners.

Most street situations can be prevented or avoided. Some cannot. Multiple attackers are a bad situation. But with proper training, you can make the best of a bad situation and hopefully come out the victor. ✕

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